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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the factors associated with the effectiveness of the nutrition education program among economically disadvantaged youth of St. Landry Parish, La. Sex, race, and age differences were found relative to food consumption. Farm youth and those with gardens tended to have a better diet. (Author/DM)

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FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NUTRITION EDUCATION AMONG ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, ST. LANDRY PARISH, LOUISIANA, 1970

by

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A copy of the complete thesis is on file in the main Library at Louisiana State University.

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors associated with the effectiveness of the nutrition education program among the economically disadvantaged youth of St. Landry Parish, Louisiana. The threefold purposes of the study were: (1) to determine the effects of a specific nutrition education program on the foods consumed among economically disadvantaged families; (2) to determine the effects of an extra eight lessons from Phase I of nutrition education prior to 16 lessons on the foods consumed; (3) to identify certain socio-economic factors concerning youth and homemakers, which might be associated with rates of change.

Selection of Sample

In June of 1969, a record of all participating youth in the parish was obtained from the St. Landry Parish Cooperative Extension office. From these records, an alphabetical list was developed of the 310 children enrolled in the program. One out of three of these were selected at random for purposes of this study, making a total of 103 youth.

Mothers of most of the youth in the program were also enrolled in an adult nutrition education program. The same aide taught both mother and child much of the same information but at different times. This study was limited to youth whose mothers were also in the program.

Conclusions

Most of the 103 respondents in the nutrition education program were exposed to similar information over the same period of time during

the year, but the association of various other factors having to do with time, degree of interest, and participation in the program was evident. Some 45 per cent of the youth in the study had received prior experiences and training in the eight-week nutrition program (Phase I), however, this was not found to be statistically significant in improving the dietary habits of the youth in the study.

Based on the findings in this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The younger boys and girls in the study tended to have had "poorer diets" and had a lower consumption of milk and bread and cereals, as compared to the older youth. Perhaps the age variable in terms of the nutrition education program could be altered to include a higher age group. Concentration of efforts with the age group displaying the greatest gains might be researched for better management of resources expended.
2. The study showed that boys tended to drink "more" milk than girls although girls had "better diets." It is perhaps a national "role" for the homemaker or girl in any family to assume the kitchen as her "domain." However, greater strides must be taken to determine the extent of nutrition education that boys and men acquire. Groups might be divided according to sex, with the men teaching boys the body-building aspects of good food habits, while girls learned to be more attractive and healthy through the selection of an adequate diet.

3. It appeared in the study that Negro youth improved their diets slightly more than whites and had a higher consumption level of the bread and cereal group. It was also found that whites were slightly more likely to have had a higher consumption of meat. These findings indicate that it is important to continue to improve nutritional gains in knowledge to all races. More research might be done to study cultural factors affecting the selection of foods.
4. It was found that youth who reported that their families had a home garden were more likely to have improved their dietary habits. Perhaps more gardening lessons should be implemented to teach the youth more about fruits and vegetables that can be grown near the home or community with the hope of increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables.
5. Eighty per cent of the youth included in the study were not enrolled in the 4-H Club program. Very few of the low-income youth were enrolled in 4-H. Greater efforts must be to interest low-income in a 4-H type club situation where there is group activity and interaction outside of the group meeting.
6. The study showed that youth from rural non-farm and rural farm areas were more likely to have increased their consumption of meat. Rural farm youth also had a higher consumption of fruits and vegetables, as compared to urban and rural non-farm youth who ate the same amount or more bread and cereal.

It was felt that some families in rural areas had greater usage of the home garden and a meat supply in the back yard or pasture. Studies might be done to determine if these factors had significance towards improving the families' diets.

7. It was determined from the data that enrollment in Phase I was not statistically significant when compared to youth's dietary food habits after eight lessons in Phase II.

An examination of the knowledge gained in an intensive, short-term program, as compared to a 32-week program may be worthy of research in greater depth an examination made of the progress made lesson by lesson.

8. It was found that the location where the youth ate lunch was not related to the quality of the youth's dietary habits. Seventy-seven per cent of the youth in the study ate lunch at school.

A suggested study may be to compare youth who eat lunch at school and are enrolled in the nutrition program to those youth who are enrolled in the program.

9. It was found that youth from families with lower incomes were slightly more likely to have had a greater consumption of milk and bread and cereals and made the greatest gain in consumption of meat and meat substitute. No consistent pattern of change prevailed when comparing income categories to consumption of the fruit and vegetable group although a statistically significant difference was recorded.

This finding indicates that youth from low-income families made gains in consumption of foods needed for good health. It could be concluded that the homemakers became aware of the importance of good dietary habits, therefore, they managed to make better food buys with the income available. Low-income youth and homemakers need additional consumer education training in nutrition.

10. It was found that the number of meetings youth attended was not statistically significant when compared to improving youth dietary habits and consumption of the meat and fruit and vegetable group. However, meetings attended were statistically significant when compared to greater consumption of bread and cereal and slightly significant when compared to the milk group.

    This study seems to indicate that meetings alone are not enough to motivate youth. More emphasis should be put on the value of "outside" activities for additional experiences and reinforcement for youth.

11. In certain food groups, it appears that youth who had fewer achievements made more progress. It may be worthy of study to determine the immediate effects of a particular lesson at specified times after. We need to know more about youth's regression in consumption of certain food group.

    This study especially showed a large proportion with regression in consumption of fruits and vegetables and bread and cereals.